

Tyler Lemoine: Southington, CT
Student – University of Connecticut
Hometown: Southington, CT

Good evening honorable members of the joint appropriations committee. Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Tyler Lemoine, I am a pathobiology major and political science minor senior at the University of Connecticut. Tonight, I urge you to consider the profound effects that these proposed budget cuts may have for higher education at UConn, because it offers an opportunity for so many students like myself.

UConn has become a second home for not only myself, but for my brother who also attends UConn as a junior, and my little sister who is going to graduate elementary school this year. This university offers a place of culture, innovation, and curiosity. My brother and I were both enthralled in being accepted to UConn, especially after being ranked in the top twenty public universities in the nation and leading the way with STEM programs as well as Human Rights. We have so much husky pride flowing through our family that even my sister at only ten has already decided to apply to UConn. But these dreams do not come without a price.

We are siblings that are also first generation college students for our family. Being a first generation student, and a student with a sibling that I can proudly say also attends the University of Connecticut, how affordable college is always plays an affect on what I am able to do and how I am able to navigate the college experience. At one point for a year at college, I had to juggle three jobs, school, and extracurricular activities during the semester, and hold jobs during my winter session and summer breaks in order to afford the simple necessities of any college student; from books to housing.

However, I was able to take time thanks to the financial aid UConn was able to afford me due to my brother attending and scholarships that both he and I had been awarded. That is what makes UConn so promising. How can you compete with one of the top notch universities in the world, and have it be affordable. Sadly, with budget cuts, students have already been receiving the brunt of the cuts. In my time, I have already seen over 6.5% increase in my tuition, while my brother will see almost 15% of an increase when he graduates, and my little sister...I cannot even imagine how she will be able to afford it with the increasing trend of tuition. It is not sustainable. Cutting the funding to this amount would hurt my family and countless families that rely on the affordability and prestige of schools just like UConn. If we hope to create innovation and elevate families like my own, then we cannot cut programs, resources, departments, and faculty. That is not sustainable.

UConn also acts as a home because of its resources. One of my most rewarding jobs that I currently work with is the Rainbow Center, a center for LGBTQIA+ students and community members, and one of the five culture centers that UConn houses. The culture centers are monumental to so many people both inside and outside of the UConn community. I've meet students that had lost all forms of support, both financially and emotionally, for being LGBT, and we luckily enough had the ability to help students in those situations. To see programs like those at risk, as well as the programs that they had helped to create in order to ensure the safety and well- being of marginalized students, makes me fearful for the future. How can we provide an equal and beneficial education, without the resources? How can we assure safety and success?

In being a UConn student, I have been awarded various opportunities that help me to grow as an individual. I have been able to be elected as a senator within USG, help create and influence policy regarding LGBT students in my own culture center, act as a college ambassador to the college of Agriculture, Health and Natural Resources, and receive internships that most of my friends attending colleges outside of Connecticut could only dream of. I have learned valuable lessons on intersectionality, leadership, courage, cooperation, and even about my own identity as a person. I have learned how to apply my major and what I have learned academically to the real world to help my own community. And all of this came from the resources, advisors, and mentors that UConn offers. To imagine any of these programs removed, any of these opportunities shortened, or any prospective student unable to receive access due to income, would be devastating.

Along with all of the leadership and experience I have acquired, I have also been awarded the opportunity to be a part of the STEM program at UConn. The STEM program here gives you the most hands on experience towards classes than any of my other classes have. I had been able to raise a chicken in my animal science course, study lyme disease in a pathobiology course, and help my friend with her research project where she is getting published for her work on tick borne illnesses, illnesses in which affect Connecticut's public health. Without this funding however, research cannot be conducted, and those same hands on experiences inside and outside of class are gone. We cannot stay innovative without these programs.

I urge you to consider reducing the cuts to the budget for the University of Connecticut and higher education for myself, for my brother, for my little sister, for first generation

students, for students of color, for LGBT+ students, and for the countless families of Connecticut. Thank you.